

Arden

Volume IV Issue 1
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Letter from the editor

The Arden has seen a lot of changes this year, changes that I hope will help fortify the literary journal as a Columbus State University tradition. From a new cover design to a full staff, the Arden has made some important strides in building a reputation for itself. My hope is that its reputation will be someday be that of an overall worthwhile endeavor and a reflection of the creative abilities of CSU's faculty, staff, and student body. After all, the Arden was begun as a much-needed creative outlet for the writers and photographers of the CSU community. And an outlet is only as useful as it is efficient, accessible, and noteworthy.

The efficient team effort behind this year's edition of the Arden helped lay the groundwork for what I believe will be the even more efficient efforts of the future. For the first time, the Arden was put together by a full staff of editors. I was truly fortunate to work with Kerry Center, Jennifer Miller, John Roach, and Chad Wayne in editing this journal. Each of them brought to the table a unique perspective and individual gifts without which this year's edition could not have been the success that it is. It was a learning process for us all, as the Arden is very much still green, but I believe that we worked some "bugs" out of the system that allowed us to present to you a finished product worthy of the pieces that this year's contributors chose to share with us.

This year's contributors were so generous with their writing and photography that the selection process was a long and difficult one for the staff, but I can assure you that we would not have had it any other way. The response was great, both in quantity and in quality. I was delighted by how many individuals wanted to share their work with CSU through the Arden. And I was even more delighted to see that the Arden's accessibility has increased this much in just the past three years. Somehow the word seems to

be getting out. More and more people are aware of the opportunity for public creative expression that the Arden affords them. This accessibility is the lifeblood of any literary journal. Because without our contributors, there would be no Arden.

And it is these contributors that make the Arden a noteworthy venture. The pieces you'll find between this year's beautifully designed cover have truly raised the bar for future Arden submissions. It is exciting to realize how much talent there really is around us, and it is even more exciting for us as editors to help see that talent go into publication. Also noteworthy in this year's Arden is the personal insight about the process of composition related specifically for the Arden by the charming and eloquent Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, Margaret Edson. I hope that someday our own Pulitzer Prize winners will look back reminiscently at the Arden as one of their first stepping-stones.

Thank you to everyone who's hard work, creativity, talent, and generosity made the Arden possible.

Jessica Trenchik, editor

The Arden

Editor-Jessica Trenchik

Associate Editors-Chad Wayne

Kerry M. Center

Jennifer Miller

Layout Editor-John Roach

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John Kocian

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Kristen Zohn

model
and the ex-shaggy
master
of disguise sit and sip
non-coffee in leather
jackets and felt berets.
They are the pinnacle,
the epitome of themselves:
cooler
than everyone not them.
She smiles, looks
around; he grins,
stares
into her averting eyes.
And he's caught
and they laugh and
no
words are spoken.
They're too cool
for that: the leather
and felt
prove it.

I am afraid
Of living. I fear because there it lay, backing
In the hot afternoon sun, smelling badly. Live
Was limp in my hands as I carried it
From its fallen spot to the shallow pit I had dug for it
In the pouring evening rains. My sweat steamed off
My burnt brow as I laid my love into the earth,
Weeping and screaming.
My hands smelt of hair and the oils of life-
Worn skin when I was done.
This is life:
Lying in a shallow grave amidst the rotting
Roots of a fallen pine where she played
When she wasn't so alive in my mind.

Despite the fact
That there was an air-
Conditioned room not
Five feet away, I remained
In the boiler-room of a kitchen
Where I was cooking hot dogs
For all my friends
Who were in the air-
Conditioned room.

Once upon a time,
There was a Man
The Man grew up.
The Man grew old.
And one day the Man died.

Once upon a time,
There was a Boy.
The Boy grew up.
The Boy grew old.
And now the Boy lives forever.

There is a little cottage, actually, nothing more than a cabin in the woods on the way to the River. There isn't much to it. It has a broad porch with a wood railing and a door of planks held together by a cross beam that goes diagonally over its face.

It has only a couple small windows. Inside there is no furniture, just a small room with a stone fireplace and a back door. Who knows why a back door in such a small abode.

The cabin is set at the bottom of a hill with cedars all around it. A stream circles around the front of the old cabin as if to create a moat, separating it from the rest of the world. And the cedars stretch an ever-comforting canopy of green over the cabin.

I love that cabin. Someday it will be mine. That's my dream...and when I close my eyes and dream of my cabin under the cedars, I escape and find refuge.

I awoke with a feeling of sorrow, of remorse. It was the dream I had last night: I was afraid and lonely so I ran to my cabin under the cedars. I heard voices – yelling, shouted orders and a strange glow of light. I stood along the stream to see my cabin burning. There were many people there – men and their sons from nearby farms. They kept the fire in check with buckets of water from the stream, but no one cared that the cabin crumbled before them. And I cried.

I must go and see for myself in the morning. I walked, sometimes ran to that quiet place among the cedars. The path crossed the snaking stream several times, but I did not worry over hopping stones, only rushing headlong through the current.

I cleared the last of the brush and stood along side the stream. There was the cabin. Peaceful – so peaceful that I think it was asleep under the cedars. I walked around the place and lingered about inside. “Do you know what is to be your fate?” A mere yawn of carelessness as a squirrel chased a nut as it bounced and rolled off the rusted, tin roof.

I left for a journey, one that kept me for some time – several months. But I came back to my cabin among the cedars. I came for respite, for renewal. My life was changing and I needed to come back home.

I wandered along the path that leads to the River. The path crossed the stream several times and each time I found the narrowest crossing and was

careful to skip from rock to log to rock till I reached the other side.

I cleared the last of the brush and stood along side of the stream.
There under the cedars was a patch of ash and rubbish. My cabin was gone.

I went to my cabin again today. There was only the chimney left of it. And then I meandered down the stream even farther. Over the years I had forgotten what was beyond the cabin. But as I walked on I discovered an outcrop of rocks that provided a kind of damp shaded haven there in the woods. I found myself climbing on and about the rock; and I was delighted to be in my home, playing here in the woods.

I laughed aloud for I was truly home. And I ran down the path jumping from rock to rock, vaulting logs and wading through pools of water – never missing a step and feeling like I was flying. Ever move through the woods so that you feel like you're flying? - running, gliding, sometimes under, sometimes over, as thoughtlessly as a deer.

Past the large rock, I began to hear the roar of the falls. I had forgotten them. When I came to the edge of the falls I cried, but they drowned out the sound of my whimpers so that the world could not hear. And I was home.

I screamed in joy, plunging into the pool below the falls. The rocks dropped off and I sank, not able to touch bottom. And the pool swallowed up my sorrows.

There were days when I wandered these hills. My mind was free and I played out adventures of heroism and valor. I was a worldwide traveler, elite soldier, guardian of the weak and champion over evil. I could escape into these woods and occasionally when the reality of fear and cowardice plagued me, the falls drowned out my whimpers of pain.

The rushing current opened into a broad shallow creek that passed through a tunnel under the railroad tracks into the river. I stood up on the tracks, now looking into the shallow pool then looking out into the lake. Catfish meandered up into the pool to loiter. And I remember, as a boy I watched like this, sometimes for hours, at the fish and the river. I used to imagine the currents flowing down the humongous canal. I dreamed what the fish might see in the fathoms under the surface. And I imagined the other side – what the opposite bank must be like.

I rode my little bicycle home at the end of each day. The sun red and the shadows getting long and a creek every time the right peddle went down and the left peddle went up. And I would dream all the way home that I had just rescued some beautiful Indian princess from some ruthless band of kidnappers. And I was riding home on my steed, the princess on the back, with the

last rays of daylight beaming over the hills.

One day, while standing on the bank, right on the edge where the shore met the water, I decided to swim across that great river. And so I did – all the way across. And I explored the other bank. I clamored about the rocks and boulders on the shore. I hiked throughout the steep hill and its wooded forest. But after that I never loitered at the end of the creek again. Never imagined what the other bank was like for now I knew. And I wished that I hadn't.

There is that place in the forest
Down-stream from my cabin
Where the water's roar drowns out my cries.

And I remember wandering through the woods,
With the rain falling cool, and dripping
From leaves beside my face onto my shoulders.
My heart sings with the cleansing and
I am content in the chorus.

Spirit of God,
Fall on us as rain,
Cleans us from sin,
Carry us into the rushing stream and wash us pure.
Give us a song of comfort and peace as
The rain dancing on pools of water.
Amen.

*For Mr. Chappel, to whom I shall always be grateful
for teaching me that carpe means to "pluck" and not to "seize"*

May you not ask—for it is not your place to ask—
what the gods have fixed for your fate, for my fate
Nor is it right for you to hear the answer
should you so seek it
It is better that you not know
whether Jupiter will grant you winters to come,
or just this final winter
that devours the pumice stone cliffs of the sea
Utilize the discerning taste of man:
strain the dregs from the wine and discard long-term plans
The envious age in which we live
steals our time as we speak
Savor this day, relying as little as you can
on the possibility of there being a next

Cherry blossom falls
Splashes murky rainwater—
Never clean again.

To take this class you must have had
Divorce 101 and experienced the death
of at least one parent.

Prerequisites also include
losing your home at least once
and never seeing childhood friends again.

More than four absences will result in
the loss of your job and current spouse or lover.

There is a penalty for late work, usually
a heart attack or cancer or, at a minimum,
a car accident, diabetes, and a long hospital stay.

There are frequent unannounced quizzes
counting 20% of your overall grade,
testing whether you will ever know
what you are doing or
why you are here.

There are two major examinations
and two end-of-term papers,
each a decade apart,
totaling 80% and evaluating
the loss of joy and beauty in your life.

Whatever the size of your class,
you will not be graded on a curve.

Oral participation
during or after this class
is not required,
nor encouraged.

Plagiarized assignments will cause you to
forfeit your firstborn,
a secret villain torturing you at night
with bloody x's on your door.

There will be an unannounced,
decades-cumulative final exam.
You cannot make up this exam or course—ever.

today the rain streaks the picture window
in perfect vertical stripes,
smearing the trees and houses beyond
into a Monet painting

you can see the blurring of browns,
the smudges of blues and yellow-greens
against the palette of slate-gray sky

the impressions of trees net together,
bordering the dots of distant houses,
the daubs of brown-purple leaves up close
for the sake of composition-
you can almost see the brush strokes

Computer recording.

Six men lying in the punctured spaceship. Two dead. Pools of vomit beneath twisted heads. Faces caked with blood. A hole, six meters in diameter. Stars, comets, asteroids flashing past in the infinite black. The ship, new space debris. More objects to fill the vacuum. All this in spite of warnings, computer projections, course changes. To no avail, these space technologies. These six astronauts. Death traps, the master technician, the supreme calculator.

Spaceship wall unperforated.

The black-haired astronaut shouting orders. During the collision, red lights flashing unheeded. Starcruiser transmissions fading rapidly, soon indistinct. Computer recording logarithmic decay. Twelve eyes staring into icy velvet blackness. Frantic calls to the command outpost. To no avail. The master computer, the ultimate programmer.

Alone, the ship.

No puncture in the wall.

The men laughing. Singing songs of home, and one out of tune. Friendly banter. No underlying hostilities. Nothing threatening but repetition and boredom.

Computer repeating nostalgic song and cataloging. Men joining in, longing to return home.

Soft, diffuse, the stars now in their luminous halos. Radiation emitted from same. And this radiation, the irony of ironies. Manifest on a scale dwarfing the human imagination, displayed repeatedly throughout the universe for alien eyes watching incuriously on transmission wavelengths, as the silenced ship torn apart. Intervention to match starcruiser's. Both of space, territory. Both unretractable, final.

Quiet, only a whistling from the rent in the spaceship wall. No air inside. Unexplained air leak or other malfunction.

Soon stops.

A powerful, gripping stillness of the vacuum, a silence lying unper-
turbed, draped like a giant cloak around the spaceship. The lights of stars glow-
ing, blinking, radiant crystals in any direction observed. An unremarkable
occurrence with repetition.

Six dead spacemen facing the gaping aperture in the vessel, facing the
all-encompassing night, an alien place that has seen the births of galaxies, the
germination of mankind, the recording of histories, the wars between planets,
the puncturing of the spaceship.

Death like silence in the starship. An ending-of war, strife, struggle.
Final peace.

Black-haired spaceman first seeing the object. Too far to determine its
exact nature. Its emission of x-rays. Signals that cannot be translated by
astronauts or computer. Black-haired astronaut at the control panel where
lights flashing wildly. Alarms screeching like mechanical beasts, awakening
one man, warning the crew. Six men scrambling to their emergency stations,
trying to identify space object. To no avail. Communications of peaceful
intent unanswered because of misunderstanding, malevolence, or nonsentience.
Object steering a course, avoiding asteroids, matching starcruiser, maneuver for
maneuver. High mobility and speed. Sentience tentatively assumed.

First-sighting astronaut lying on his side, arms flung out on the floor.
Head twisted. Neck muscles bunched like knotted ropes. Unblinking eyes
staring wild with fear and awe in direction of perforation. Mouth contorted at
corners with disbelief, terror, astonishment. Sweating face pallid, palms clam-
my. Heartbeat faster, faster, stopped. Body cooling and stiffening, legs becom-
ing rigid like logs.

Others dying in exact repetitions, one by one.

Each uncaring for the others dying before him, now that each knows
the certainty of his death.

Computer recording this and vital signs of men as they die.

Frantic questions put to the computer: propulsion method, material of
distant object, ETA, . . . Insufficient information. Insufficient information.

Insufficient information. . . .

Living? Sentient?

Conflicting data. Conflicting data.

Computer questions continuing to be asked at rapid rate of six per approximately twelve seconds, decreasing to one per sixty seconds after two minutes, dropping to one per three hundred seconds after four minutes.

No further questions after five minutes.

Computer recording this, as everything else. To no avail.

The six spacemen despondent, lethargic, frozen with helplessness. Six pairs of staring eyes, glazed with foreboding. Arms hanging limp at sides like deflated balloons. Mouths agape, speech impaired as a high-pitched whine piercing ears, blocking other sensations, can't be shut out. Eyes rolling in their sockets, faces contorted, hands on ears unavailing, whining pain reaching their stomachs and then vomiting, then dry retching. The six men reeling, falling as they try to scream. Incessant battering at spaceship wall. A ripping. A perforation in the wall and a blazing sphere of magenta light bursting through, squeezing itself out of shape at the edges to fit. Inside the ship. Six-meter diameter hole. Deafening whine.

Six men nearly senseless on the floor. Unbearable pain.

The brilliant sphere alighting like a butterfly on the black-haired spaceman and its color pulsing, its slightly expanding shape in synchronization with fluctuations in the whine's pitch. Spokes of mauve light shooting out from the sphere in all directions.

Continuous attempt to scream by men.

No puncture in the wall.

Black-haired astronaut playing 3-D radial chess with blond shipmate. Computer keeping record of this game, as all others. Black-haired astronaut winning the game easily, smiling while sitting with arms crossed in the webchair and talking of going home. Computer display glowing brightly with black and white pieces outlined on red and white squares. Both astronauts hunched over the board. In opposite webchair, blond studying the display intently, disconcerted, trace of a frown. Dictating his move to the computer. Other leaning forward and dictating countermove, winning. Checkmate verified by computer. Congratulations. Blond rising from webchair

into another room. Black-haired astronaut yawning, stretching. Repetitions. Walking to control panel with its myriad lighted disks and squares. Stooping to examine data. Eyes widen, eyebrows arch, while locating light force, energy object, and summoning other spacemen.

Questions immediately fed into computer.

Questions repeated. To no avail.

Even now the six men laughing at a joke about ESP that one has told. The black-haired commander. Attempt to ease friction in the group. Irritability high lately for no apparent reason. Prickly feeling of electricity at the back of their necks. The eye of the hurricane, the mouth of the vortex. Some dreaming nightmares of space.

The starship lurching suddenly. A rent in the fabric of time. Unaccounted for in spite of exhaustive investigation. Tremendous stress on the ship's walls. One astronaut claiming he glimpsed a large hole in the spaceship wall. No flaw detected by first-hand inspection, computer, or portable instruments. Astronaut adamantly affirming he saw the hole appear, even though it lasted less than half a second. To no avail.

Saliva mingled with blood drooling from the astronaut's mouth. Warm body. Recently dead. Minutes ago. All the others dead, heaped on the floor like a pile of rusted tools. The light force leaving the ship. Magenta light flashing through the hole in the wall. Whining trailing after it. Even though no one hears. Pulsing as it races into the starry distance.

The starship decelerating, stops, reversing direction. Slowly drifting the way it came.

The six men motionless. Temperature cooling.

In their time of dying.

The six spacemen gawking at each other, numbing panic spreading like a blight. As the object approaches with lightspeed. No identification to be made of the too strange, the too alien. Force, energy, light—these, the only intersection with human experience. Compacted into one inscrutable package of life.

No longer the dance of death.

The six astronauts standing helpless, waiting for contact. Just waiting.

A meeting with an alien savior? An enigmatic god? The six men saying no prayers in this, their time of transfiguration.

The entity of inconceivable energy and power, feeding off ripples of time and then rerouting the stream for replenishment. Its need. All that has been said, known. No more known, no more to say.

The six astronauts realizing what has happened, occasional glimpses of what will happen. Themselves in death. Themselves in fear. In pain. And again in fear. And again. Jumbled time waves flapping chaotically like strands of a thin curtain crossing in the wind. A part of the stage acting, the scripting, a vivid, dreamlike series of events detached from causation, from continuity. The nightmare beginning again and again. They, willing or not, all the same to them. The way it happens, is all.

Chilly, the six dead bodies in their time, from the hole in the ship's wall.

Cool metal tombs.

Feeding the star creature. Time and time again.

Six dead spacemen in tight silvery uniforms, sprawled on the floor, two with fluid leaking from eyes, wide gashes across their heads.

Gone, the whining. Vanished, the star creature, satiated.

Hole remaining unaltered.

Direction of starcruiser continuing as exact reverse of original.
Territorial instinct fulfilled.

Starship floating through space like a needle in thick black oil. Silence of the vacuum. Immense whirling bands of spiral nebulae sprouting webs of stars that glitter like sand on a beach. Clusters of asteroids colliding like plastisteel sponges. One entire side of the ship glinting in amber sunlight. Other side cloaked in shadows, umbra along the horizontal axis within penumbra. The penetrating clarity of space. No mists, haze, atmosphere to obscure. Sense of unending depth, as if falling into an abyss. Sense of disorientation. No markers or familiar, immediate references. Directions meaningless. All appearing the same. The shining silver projectile, adrift on the sea of black, pointed towards white, blue, red, and yellow dots scattered in the distance.

Stars like pinpoints of paint splashed on a black velvet canvas. Gaseous coils of vermilion wreathing a triangle of stars flickering like signal beacons.

Nearby ash-gray moon, cleaved in shadow, hanging in space like a toy ball on invisible wires. A lidless eye pockmarked with craters, ridged with mountains.

A silence that engulfs all.

The waiting. Nothing interrupting the steady state. The glittering stars, drifting spaceship, comets, planets, moons, asteroids, in sharp relief. Each year passing like the last. Each century, like the last. An unremarkable occurrence with repetition. All of time becoming the same.

Six dead astronauts lying still, eyes not watching this view through the hole in their time. Any other eyes not seeing. No human life in this part of the galaxy.

After a century, a bursting of light, a nova. An enormous eruption of gases, finally collapsing into a smaller star, like a new holopainting whose colors have been sucked into the center. An unremarkable occurrence with repetition. Computer recording these events as time references.

Hole enlarged by asteroids. Some trapped inside starship. Bodies occasionally hit, dented skulls, bones.

Endless drifting and stillness.

No spoken words since the spaceship's perforation. Centuries and centuries of unbroken silence.

Starcruiser entering familiar space. Altered constellations of home. Computer recording this too.

The civilized worlds dwarfed, nearly invisible next to the red and yellow suns.

Repeated electromagnetic signals hardly perturbing the black silence of eternity.

My orders to Korea had come like many Army orders come,
in a green and white envelope. "PERSGRAM" it said.

My next four months at home passed quickly.

But, I'd gotten almost everything done –
and at least all the important things had gotten done.

Things like explaining to a little five-year-old girl
that Daddy was going across the ocean for a long time.

Why couldn't she come?

Don't they have little girls in Korea?

After many questions and some not so good explanations,

I think she understood –
at least as much as a five-year-old can.

My wife was accepting, supportive, committed – no surprises there.
She would do what was needed to keep our little family blessed.

We could survive being apart. We'd done it before.

We even had a little phrase we used:

"We're where we need to be, doing what we need to be doing."

I really wasn't concerned about her.

Ten years of memories told me not to be.

But, my two-year-old son, he was another story.

I remember going in to kiss him good-bye –
my little boy, my little man, my little buddy.

The nightlight lit the room softly as I took him in.

My big boy! Won't be long now and he'll be in a bed.

He almost took up the whole crib now. I smiled.

I always like watching him when he's asleep,
his face so relaxed, his lips so kissable (as Mom said),
his busy hands resting – they needed that rest!

I did not want to wake him, so instead of kissing his face,
I kissed my fingertips and gently touched his head.

He won't understand -
the thought that kept making me cold on the inside.
This little boy won't understand why Daddy left.
What would he think? What would he feel?
Would he remember me...

Would he think that I wanted to leave,
that I didn't want to be with him anymore?
If there was one thing I could tell him now,
that would be it. That I didn't want to go.
Not for a day, certainly not for a year.

I imagined how he'd be the next time I'd see him.
Definitely bigger – even more full of energy?
I wasn't sure that was possible.
Maybe talking in phrases...
I would hold that picture like a treasure in my mind.

The last thing we had done together before bedtime
was pick up blocks after playtime.
It's funny how you remember things like that.

In a few hours, I'd be on a plane
And in another day, I'd be halfway around the world.
I guess that's about as far away as you can be,
unless you're in outer space.

I'd hugged him extra these last few days
and especially today.

Does the love you give in a hug last,
or does it slowly fade away – day-by-day?
Does it last for a whole year?

Good-bye, Matthew.

Too many friends stealing my time,
Too much time lost every day,
Days slowly become faded,
Faded thoughts with circular reason,
Reason now is hard to find,
Find the truth to be determined,
Determined paths do not exist,
Existence is the breath in between,
Between the lines, life lies,
Lying friends become enemies,
Enemies are never forgotten,
Forgotten fantasies surface in the children,
Children have a vision of truth,
Truth changes with age,
Age rapidly kills dreams,
Dreams are a necessary escape,
Escape to regroup time,
Time stolen by too many friends

She is there in red

color

favorite

mine

She seemed to be a mirage

there

gone

where

She was only a slight

memory

Surely my mind was sharper

Than I truly realized

knives

needles razors

A fascination to my heart

lust

want

have

There was something in me

hunger

passion

need

That she fed to my soul

brilliance
luminescent
marvelous

then
yesterday
past

wonder
incredible
magnificent
She was beyond glory

Everything I knew changed
My world was turned sideways
And thrown to the curb

She was angelic to behold
I craved her every step

Selfishly I longed for her to come my way

road

path

trail

I existed because of her

lived

breathed

loved

But nothing mattered

I was new

different

changed by her

Forever she would remain

singed

ingrained

melded in my eyes

Excuse me for stepping over the line
 (if I did)
Because sometimes your expressions blur
 (in that way)
And I forget where the line existed
 (at my feet?)
I was always hypnotized by your charm
 (you are beauty)
Sometimes it is hard to control myself
 (all the time)
A heart does not mean to go wayward
 (somewhere out there)
But sometimes life just happens before my eyes
 (before your eyes)
And it shows me a soul like yours is divine
 (almost quite perfect)
Beaming an unknown still peace
 (never properly upheld)
Tapping the sensors of my brain
 (stinging little lovejoy)
Bringing about a simple pulse in my veins
 (sacrifice my life)
I did not mean to say those words aloud
 (I love you)
Because I know it will never be the time
 (or the place)
For delicacies to flutter from my lips
 (shattering your peace)
Forgive me for trespassing in your territory
 (let life continue)
And ignore the crazy tendencies I might have
 (Silly little me)

In this moment...I lose all vision
Walking blindly in the moonlight
Searching for the only love I know
Raw beauty and electricity you contained
Never could brain frequencies in my head
Travel as fast as they did without sight

In this moment...I lose all sound
Turning this way and that
Feeling for the only love I know
The things you had whispered
Swirling like black holes in my head
Spinning at a break-neck pace

In this moment...I lose all smell
Tilting my head sideways
Trying to grab those scents that were
Sweet and intoxicating from you
Airy crispness wafting through my head
Entering cruelly in places unannounced

In this moment...I lose all taste
Sensing those things I once knew
Attempting to find that purity
Dance upon my lips and on the tip of my tongue
Kisses traveling at warp speed in my head
The silver memories you created

In this moment...I lose all feeling
Knowing not that which is hot or cold
Wandering into the new unfamiliar
Softness, texture of your skin somehow remembered
Shudders and shivers chill my head
Seemingly unknown to me

In this moment...I lose all emotion
Forgetting everything that existed about you
Losing complexion over all that was lost
Love burrows somewhere unfound
Wallowing itself deep in my head
And all drops to a standstill

In this moment...I stand my ground
Pitting myself against it all
Surrendering in the great beyond
A place that I do not know of
Some imagination falsely created in my head
Where I have lost everything dear

In this moment...I lose myself in you
Where I am brought back to perfect harmony
By the way you move in my blood
To awaken all of the senses that had deadened
They all flow straight in my heart
Where I appreciate what you truly are

Late Winter Afternoon
Approaches slowly - much the way a chill
Comes in through an open door.
The sun slips under the cover
Of nightfall,
Slant of light, wavers -
Holding to the remains of the day.
Silhouettes of Living,
Move towards home.

It invades my mind.
An infestation.
A disease.
It attaches itself to my brain.
It won't be denied.
It grows.
It spreads.
It's tentacles fastens onto
Every nerve.
It seizes every part of
My mind.
Then it radiates down
Into my eyes.
Causing my vision to be
Impaired,
Tunnel-visioned.
I'm not able to see
Around me.
I can only see what is
In front of me
Like a horse with
Blinders on.
The disease continues its
Path of destruction
Down to my hand.
Causing it to
Curl in on itself.
It encircles a
Pen,
Pencil,
Marker,
Color pencil,
Anything.
It forces me to
Write.

This cursed/blessed disease is a
Writer's insatiable
Need
To record their thoughts.

Words of apology echo to you
inside this deep dark cavern,
but I cannot force their way outside.
I cannot make them leave sealed lips
or enter into shut off ears.

I want to swat the bee away
that is perched on your arm, awaiting to sting,
but my hand is frozen, and so it bites,
as I am powerless to stop it.

If you would come inside the cavern
and not simply stand outside
conversing with the flowers
as the weeds are dying away,
it may not hurt so much.

If you could be the candlelight
and not let me blow it out,
it may all be okay.

But I cannot stop the sundrops from fading
on the dampened and torn petals
or catch them as they fall.

Shimmering dresses, delirious smiles,
romantic music...
A night of wonder spoiled,
my fairy tale coldy ripped by
a rotten toad of a prince,
a falsity in black and white,
uncaring of his adoring princess,
and how I loathed to play the part,
“beautiful” in a pastel picture of pain,
undone to perfection with done-up hair,
shimmering only in sequins of tears,
a confetti of broken promises,
a tropical island of shattered glass,
lost only in bewilderment...
A little girl’s dream cursed and plagued,
Cinderella contorted by reality
as a rain of imaginary tears
collected in an invisible puddle on my face,
ruining the makeup that covered the truth.

The stiff chunky red plastic chair bore into my backside as I shifted nervously. The room was dim and I held my aching head in my hands. It was deserted now, except for a small middle-aged man who looked at a magazine without reading it. He tapped his foot in time to a rhythm in his head and seemed oblivious to my very existence. On the other hand, I wasn't exactly craving for conversation.

My mother sat in the next room; I could see her through the dirty window separating us. The waiting room smelled like rubber, burned rubber, scalding hot and steaming. I turned my face away from the window and instead occupied myself by staring at the floor. It was simply fascinating watching the small troops of ants scurry across the linoleum, so tiny, so uncaring. I knew why my mother chose to sit in the other room. I understood that she thought I killed Krissie.

Krissie. Thinking of her name made me remember, made me remember what I wanted so desperately to forget: the gunshot, its horrible mocking sound reverberating on the walls of our house and falling down upon my ears, tickling my senses, jarring at my brain. Krissie's screams, muted by the open, gaping, laughing mouth of the gun, made my blood run cold. I could still hear them in my head. I could see now, instead of the ivory color of the hospital walls, Krissie's pale face, her ice-blue eyes and her mouth, her perfect mouth, still forming a surprised "O".

I averted my mind from the hideous thoughts and watched as the man mindlessly flipped pages of magazines and books. A doctor in green scrubs splotted with bright red blood came in. "Mr. Smith?"

The man looked up slowly, as if it was too painful to look away from the pages that provided him solace from the world around him. "Yes?"

The doctor sat beside him and patted his shoulder. "I have good news. You have a beautiful new little girl."

The man nodded like a slow child trying to comprehend. "And my wife?"

The doctor sighed. "Unfortunately, we were unable to save Catherine. I'm sorry. We did all we could. It just wasn't in our hands." He patted his shoulder as if he were saying, "Good puppy, nice puppy." "She asked me to tell you that she loves you very much."

The doctor led him away then, the man stumbling over his feet and the

brown overcoat that was much too big for him.

Is that what it will be like for me? I thought. Was a doctor in green, dotted with my sister's blood like a speckled deranged Christmas ornament, going to sit by me and pat my head and say they did all they could, but it wasn't enough? Would she send me a message?

I felt alone, perfectly and utterly alone. My mother sat in a room as far away as she could get, while my only sister lay dying in a bed somewhere, while I quietly sank away into the ugliest chair I had ever seen and drowning in my woes in a sea of ants. In anger, I smushed the one under my food. It wig-gled its legs and died.

To my surprise, my mother appeared in the doorway. She looked at me, mixed emotions playing behind her aging gray eyes. Suddenly, she ran to me and threw her arms around me, engulfing me in a mass of motherliness. "Oh, Becky, I'm so sorry. I just needed time by myself to think."

I didn't say anything. I just held on, afraid I would lose her, too.

"I love you so much, Becky," she whispered into my ear. Her words of hope shone a new ray of light in my mind. The broken light above my head in the ceiling flickered back on as it buzzed with new life and vibrancy, breaking through the darkness.

Did she believe me when I said that I had no idea what happened to Krissie? Or did she choose to believe it was me? Whatever the case, I had my mother back in my arms. Nothing else mattered at that moment.

Krissie died that night, enclosed inside that other world where we could neither see nor touch her, or say good-bye. After seventeen years of knowing Krissie, my sister, but not knowing Krissie, the person, I hadn't in a sense even begun to say "Hello".

He murdered me and gave birth to me all in the same second.

For weeks, I tried to cocoon myself in my own world like a fat little worm waiting to born again into something far more beautiful than itself. When the thought protruded itself into my mind that perhaps I should allow him to wriggle himself inside to transform with me, my heart knew that my only option was to wrap myself tighter into the silken web of self-deceit that I had woven.

To confess (to no one but the empty air, of course, not even to myself) I was secretly entranced by him. I attributed it to my underlying perverseness; I knew he was bad, I knew he was wrong. Just what my heart needed. One more good solid break, another crack in the already rocky foundation. Perhaps, I thought, if I inflicted on more blow upon its deteriorating walls, it would finally crumble and die. With no heart, one can never love. When one can never love, one can never die: the secret of immortality.

Jack stroked my face with his surprisingly tender hand as we sat talking in the uncomfortable cluttered backseat of his car. The movie having finished well over two hours ago, I wondered why I had allowed myself to stay.

"I should go in, Jack," I said. I didn't mean it.

"You don't want to," he said as he looked at me with ice gray eyes. No. I didn't want to.

As our conversation continued to float into the night sky, the words empty and nonsensical, yet meaningful and profound as well, my leg had, unbeknownst to me, magnetized to his. We talked about the weather, the movie we just saw, my psychotic roommates, our childhood memories... the kind of things that friends discuss over coffee at some trendy café, not in the backseat of a car in a deserted dorm parking lot.

He would not want to change with me, I thought. Jack is a spider who would much rather violently consume me in the midst of my glorious transformation than to be the catalyst for the change. I was the unsuspecting worm upon which his arachnid instincts had fixed.

In the nearby tree, hanging from a low, broken branch, a beautiful cocoon started to unravel. I watched in awe, impatiently waiting to see a lovely butterfly emerge from its hiding place. I could envision bright blue wings with yellow and black beauty marks and long, sensitive antennae to help it find its way in the darkness.

The silk disintegrated from its shell and fell to the ground. A drooping caterpillar, half transformed, its head grotesquely misshapen, its body lumpy with one partially grown wing, landed on the solid pavement beside the car with a thud and did not move, not even one last shudder in its dying moment.

Jack was still looking at me, apparently waiting for an answer to a question I did not hear. In the moonlight among the unfettered stars and the radiance of the street lamps, he looked almost... well... beautiful. Not harmful, not vengeful, not even all that bad.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" I asked sheepishly, hating to admit that my attention had been diverted.

He shook his head and smiled. "Never mind, you're not paying attention to me anyway." He glanced at his watch, feigned a yawn, and said, "It's getting late. Maybe I should let you get inside. I'll see you at the office tomorrow." The latter was a direct statement, not a question or an uncertainty. He knew I'd be there.

Fear gripped my heart and whispered that if I let this chance slip away, I too would fall from my cocoon haven to splatter on the unforgiving ground.

Before I could attempt to detain him a moment longer, he whispered, "I really want to kiss you right now."

Beneath long, dark, uncertain lashes, I tried to hide as I quietly replied, "Really? I want to kiss you."

His triumphant grin was boisterously splashed across his face and his tone was cocky and playful as he said, "You have to kiss me first."

Why? I wondered. To prove myself? To succumb as his prize? "No," I responded.

"Okay, fine," he said, glancing away in feigned disinterest. "I guess *somebody* won't be getting kissed tonight."

My bones ached to make him stay, to not allow him to leave me just as I was about to transform. It scared me to think that in him, there was a gleaming light that could be my only source of energy to emerge from the cocoon.

Turning back to me, ever the determined one, he said, "Okay, I'll make you a deal. At least tell me you want me to kiss you."

"Okay," I whispered, pulling him back by the cotton sleeve of his shirt.

He leaned in slowly, and as his head neared mine, I could feel all my morals of my life rising in my throat as bubbles of regurgitation. It was not, obviously, the thought of kissing him that nauseated me; it was the idea of kissing him, liking it, and him leaving me behind with an unraveled cocoon and a deadened heart.

What if I should die? I thought.

To live, you must die, my mind told my wrenching soul. You must be born again. The old you must die and the new life shall be the one to dig the grave and toss in wilting flowers, never shedding a tear.

So, he kissed me.

And I liked it.

So, I kissed him.

And I liked it.

I died that night, my eyes rolled back as I glimpsed the stars above me one last time. My surroundings, the car, the backseat clutter, Jack's lips on my neck, all disappeared, and I went limp. Images of myself in good-little-school girl outfits, working hard on projects at my desk, avidly going to church and praying for forgiveness for the sins I never committed, all burned before my eyes in the smoldering ashes of Jack's cigarette butt.

I was reborn in his arms, not from a cocoon and not as a beautiful creature. Like the undulating waves of a river washing over the stagnant black rocks, I let the past float by, not trying to catch with it or cling to it. I decided for the first time in my existence to just be. The rocks could not follow the river or advance to see what enormous wave would crash over its surface next. Neither could I.

I shut my eyes and kissed him again, letting the wave cleanse me in my infant state, deciding that it wasn't so bad to let him in, after all.

A highway. That's all I know right now.

The sky is dark. Menacing clouds threaten rain, but are only bluffing. They tower menacingly over the landscape, although I fail to see what's so menacing about columns of suspended ice particles, no matter how dark they are.

It's days like this that remind me of Alisha. More precisely, they remind me of "Great Expectations." Not because I remember the weather being quite so gloomy in the novel, but because it was when I began reading it. I was reading because Alisha had read it and liked it...No, that wasn't it. She had said that she was like that girl in it..what was her name..? I don't remember because I hadn't been paying attention; I was just skimming through it so that I could tell her that I had read it. That was how he was going to win her heart. However, when I finished it I realized that I had just received what would prove to be the most poetic rejection of my life.

That hurt.

Just one more piece of a life I'm leaving behind. Or had left behind. It's a moot point, I think, "because I called her today, didn't I?" And indeed I had. We talked for a half hour; More honestly, we awkwardly attempted a conversation. At the end she sweetly said "Thanks for calling," but I'm not sure that she meant it. Now I'm driving down an Ohio highway, pained memories of an aborted love supposedly left behind, and rumblings in my soul to answer the silence of the less-than-frightening ice particles I mentioned earlier.

I turn on the radio. "Hot For Teacher" is just starting. Great Drums. I turn off the radio. Lousy lyrics.

I think about heading home, but laugh at the idea. Where is home? I'm moving. Left Georgia. Going to Baltimore. Great move. Start a whole new life. But when does home stop being home? When I get checks with my new address on them? Somewhere between Baltimore, MD and Columbus, GA? When I decided to move?

A town now.

I drive through the town, heading for where the clouds are darkest. It's getting on to night, however, so the clouds are pretty much all around dark. I drive aimlessly, hoping to get lost, but fail. I see a store, and pull into the parking lot.

I go in to buy a composition notebook. Cute cashier. Cashierette.

Cashier-person. Chick. Whatever is ok, she's cute. I consider flirting, but don't. Beth wouldn't like that. I leave, satisfied with my prize, and think: "Gotta write this stuff down."

Rain clouds fill the sky,
Stormy clouds at a distance-
Thunder from afar.

I've been called Hobbes by some people before, in regards to my low opinion of human nature. It simply must be noted, however, that the Hobbes they were referring to is not the philosopher of old, but the tiger in the comic strips.

I am not a happy man. I'm not unhappy, just not happy. There are several reasons for this, but the main one is because I hate people.

Hate is a strong word, often uttered thoughtlessly, without consideration of the implications thereof. This is not the case here. I really hate people. Or rather, in an effort to contradict everything I've just told you, I don't hate people. I hate the little, evil things about people that make them "only human." (A far more dire sin than murder, in my eyes, is being "only human.") Take, for instance, the opinion thing.

I used to think that every individual has an intelligent opinion, and a right to one. Now I believe that most people wouldn't recognize an intelligent opinion if it wore a nametag. Furthermore, I believe that the intelligence of an opinion is inversely related to the desire of it's bearer to share it. The weather is a good example. Most people share the same view of the weather: i.e., it's fine, but it could be better. Which is a fair assumption. Therefore, there aren't many new and insightful opinions about the weather floating around. Which, in a way, is a good thing, because the air is cluttered already with an infinite amount of meaningless observations about the weather that everyone is making. "Boy, it sure is (hot/cold/wet/dry/almost downright sickeningly nice) today, isn't it?" I would enjoy these opinions if they were unique, but they aren't, as you may have guessed. Or at least deduced from the context. If someone would espouse "The weather is nice, but the air could be a little mintier" I would love them forever. Until then, I will have to do with people commenting on how it was raining, wasn't raining, will rain soon, or has rained in the past.

But what really makes me mad is the fact that I realized that, not so deep down inside, I'm only human, and therefor has no right to speak.
I hate that.

Sea of flowers
Thousand different stems.
All alike

Another Road

Beth and I ride in the darkness. She doesn't speak, despite my efforts to prod her into talking. Silent, she stares off into the distance. She is tortured by guilt; I, by sympathy. Together, we drive home, each feeling quite alone. Her hand in mine provides no pressure. I frequently look down to make sure that our fingers remain intertwined. I look to her for any signs of affection or comfort, but am greeted only by her ear as she faces out the window.

"Beth?"

Her head turns reluctantly to me.

"I love you."

All the passion and power of these three magical words, all the hundreds of hours of talking and laughing together, all the feelings we share, all tied in the these three, short syllables, evoke only a small, pained smile.

"I love you, too." She turns back away

Man and woman
Sitting in a car
Both riding alone.

There are two parts to a journey: leaving and arriving. Between these two parts lies the journey. Often the journey extends beyond these two points. Life, for some people, is not merely one journey, but a string of overlapping ones. These people, for whatever reason, can never remain anywhere they are. Whether for necessity or luxury, for business or pleasure, their smaller journeys become the center of their lives. Be it from a passion for change, an overly dynamic nature, or perhaps an inability to appreciate what they have, these souls are always on the road. I am one of those people.

I blame it on my ancestors. My family is fifth-generation carnie. (Carnival Workers. Entertainment Personnel. Amusement Facilitators. Whatever looks best on the résumé.) so constantly moving is in my blood. Almost every summer of my upbringing has been spent moving from town to town, city to city, lot to lot. Very rarely did we stay for more than one week.

I think that my wandering days are over now. I'm in Baltimore with Beth, and am happy. Yet, still I feel that old familiar tug again. I've been here for less than a month, and yet I long for the open road, that feeling of going someplace, of doing something. I've arrived, which perhaps is my least favorite part. As Cervantes said, "The road is always better than the inn." But I must ignore my wanderlust for now. Beth can't travel, and I'm not leaving her. So I bide my time.

For now.

Bird lands again-
Although newly arrived
Ready to leave.

We are riding in the darkness. Beth holds my hand as we silently travel home. I look at her, and she smiles. We are happy.

We speak no words. If we feel a need to emphasize our love or happiness, a squeeze will suffice.

We gaze off into the night, seeing nothing. Nothing in the inky blackness around us can hold our attention.

Lost in thought, we travel together. They symbolism is not lost on me, but I doubt that it ever occurred to her. Beth is a realist, a pragmatic, although she is intrigued by my romanticism, often agreeing wholeheartedly when I speak of our love poetically.

This is how we travel: together, silently, and completely assured of our love, despite all differences.

She squeezes. I smile.

These twin stars
Travelling night sky
Silent

I think Beth is uncomfortable with my being around. Not so much as she would rather I went home, but enough so that our visits together are tinted with unease.

It's almost as if the experience is too rich for her, like a handful of chocolates. It's too good to be true. There is an almost palatable air of guilt around her. There is a stiffness in her embrace, an edginess in her words when she speaks.

I love her, and she loves me, but I wonder how much longer this can last.

Chill in the air
Summer sun dips down
This day soon over.

Tears run down Beth's face. As yet, they remain unanswered on mine. Her words drive out all feeling in my heart, leaving a hollow emptiness inside.

"...and I think that you should go back to Georgia. I'm sorry."

I could form no calculated response, nothing witty to change her mind. I am at a loss, for words and for feelings. I fall silent and walk to the window. Thoughts, plans, race to my mind. I have no idea what to do. My suddenly turned itself upside down. My passion for change, my overly dynamic nature, my hunger for the open road, all are called into question. Did I want this? Could I take it? It's one thing to accept changes that I control. Could I accept some that I didn't?

I know that I can't make it through this alone, but with God's Help, I might even enjoy it.

Butterfly
Tossed by the wind
Changes course.

With God's help. What a ridiculous phrase. As if I could entreat God to merely help me. I can't imagine such a pathetic god, waiting in the wings until his creation calls for help. A neurotic deity, indeed, that provides grace and mercy, but demands no obedience or submission.

No wonder so many Christians have such spiritual problems. They expect to be able to live their own lives as they see fit, and expect God to come running when the going gets tough. Ridiculous! What fools can truly believe that the Creator will serve his creation?

Never again will I allow myself to believe that "with God's Help" I can achieve anything. I repent of the sin of pride. As John said, "He must be more, I must be less." By whatever means, whatever tools, whatever mystery, I must drain my soul of my ego and fill it with the Spirit of God. That's the greatest journey I can make.

Spinning wheel,
Potter, crushing clay,
Begins again.

This damned road again.

I-70. The most painful interstate on the face of the earth.

I love the open road. The delirious freedom of speed is what drives me. It's a narcotic, numbing my consciousness into a Zen state of "go."

So here I am, at a rest area in Pennsylvania, watching the people go by. I notice that they almost all have one thing in common: Very rarely do I see one person in a car. In fact, I dare say that I am the only person travelling alone here. That's the only thing that I hate about the open road: It's so damn lonely. Beth didn't cry while I was leaving. She said that she felt too ill, and didn't want to cry just yet. I've only seen her cry once, when she asked me to return home.

No, Beth didn't cry, and I barely escaped it. Perhaps the only continuing prevention is this constant procession of dashed white lines to my left.

Long road ahead
Not much behind
Turning key.

I have yet to overcome loneliness. It's a strange thing for me. Very rarely am I content with my surroundings. With Beth I missed my family; now I miss Beth.

Perhaps I'm too insecure. Perhaps not arrogant enough. Perhaps I'm perfectly normal.

More than anything, I miss Beth. I don't mind the missed opportunity for a new life. I don't mind returning to my old friends, to Columbus, to the University. But I desperately long for Beth. I can't escape the feeling that we were meant for each other, that we belong together. I feel like an abortion was performed on a relationship just beginning to bloom completely.

But she insists that it's not permanent. She assures me that she wants to get back together again later, when we're both more prepared.

I don't mind waiting for her. A few years, at most, is nothing compared to a lifetime of love that would follow. I, however, have a sinful need to know what exactly what's going to happen.

Horse walking
Led by his master
Chomping at the bit.

The carnival again. I have returned "home."

The Old Man and I are tearing down the merry-go-round. Nothing is going well tonight. It's taking too long to do this, I'm too tired too early. Perhaps I'm out of shape, But I can't think of anything right now, on account of the steel horse that I am holding.

The Old Man isn't that old. Fifty, at most. I call him that because he constantly complains that he is overworked for his age. If he realizes that you aren't listening he will repeat the last thing he said much louder, presumably for dramatic effect. "I'm too old to be doing all this...TOO OLD TO BE DOING ALL THIS!!"

His voice grates on my very soul. All I want to see is a carnival's worth of rides all up on trailers. Definitely not an aging man complaining about the work that he elected to do.

As the night goes on, the rides go down, and I get a little older. Soon, I can complain too.

Steel horses
Impaled on steel poles
Grinning madly

Beth laughs at me because I alternately tell her that I love and hate the carnival. It's true, however: When I tell her I love it, I love it, and when I tell her I hate it, I hate it. I have a passionate feeling for it which swings between these two extremes like a pendulum. At best, I can simply ignore my feelings, do my job, and bide my time.

I keep writing in these new conditions. Beth, I think, is the only person that really cares, besides me. I write mainly to satisfy myself, but also for her. I hope that she's proud of me.

This carnival... I don't know what to think. Whether it will be just a summer job or a way of life remains to be seen.

After closing
When the lights are out
This pen, still moving

Independence day. The turnout is disappointing, to say the least. A neighboring town is putting on it's own festival, which draws the people away. The inevitable comparisons to years past depress me. My sour mood is in sharp contrast to the joyous celebration about me. Then again, I never was much of a patriot.

The endless stream of anthems are transformed into one shrill note by the inferior loudspeakers employed by the townspeople. Instead of inspiring feelings of love and devotion to the State, they merely annoy me, bringing to mind a poem by e e cummings.

After a quick conversation with Beth, I am finally liberated from my feelings towards her. Freed of longing, I finally accept our relationship as completed, and a new one just beginning. Another journey finished. Independence Day.

Explosions-
Masses around me
Into bathroom

An image built
Of invincibility.
A facade before eyes,
Yours and mine alike,
Shattered -
Brought down in a heap of rubble.

The great structures fall
And crumble with our hearts.
Security destroyed.

One week and one day have passed,
And we seem to be back
To our normal routine.
And everyone seems
To have already forgotten
That there is work to be done,
And a war to be fought.

Facing the invisible enemy,
Like a rattlesnake,
Ready to strike into thin air.

The leader at the helm -
The way he got there forgotten,
As well should be,
For now it seems to be a mute point.
So, here we are.
And here you are.
And thus I have only two questions:

What do we do now?
Can you rebuild our America?

Stream through the lines,
Never stopping to look behind.
The words on the page,
Or the staring eyes of those who see
What's beyond here.
We must wait to know,
For perception is limited
When hateful blood courses through veins.
A constant chain,
With links so strong and thick,
It seems as though they cannot be broken.

Deep enough.
Deep enough in society to survive
All the fashions and trends,
And all the people who carry it.
Hate has an almost mystical power,
An ability to use fear to foster its own strength
And ignorance as a never-ending fuel,
With roots so deep they grow a second mighty oak
On the opposite end of the earth.

One must wonder
If this force can be stopped.

A silent scream,
Trapped,
Inside a crumbling consciousness.
Torn,
Between love and hate and desire and pride,
Apart and broken down into nothing.
If I am wrong,
And this may well be,
Then who is right?
It's all,
Everything and nothing,
Relative to mood.
Do you exist
Because you breathe
Or see?
Is perception the key?
Maybe these things
Are not to be known.
Or maybe
We are all too afraid to exist
Outside of the envelope.

potent....

boundless....

constant...

waves of mercy

everchanging the shore

of my being....

relentlessly breaking away

the protective dunes

surrounding my heart

with misbelief...

battered by love

I look to the pilings

of my soul

to see.....

do

still

stand

?

We descended every summer into that hotbed
of small brick houses with green backyards,
that held back briars and stalks of corn
and white men who talked round and round
a seasoned cedar picnic table full of empty beer cans
where legends were created for young eyes
that played on and on and closer, as they grew older,
to that circle that smelled of crappie fishing and beer.

Red heated summers that drove pale drunken men
into a night where young eyes played with growing up.

Eyes introduced to a field where kids played ball
and white men burned crosses.
Where fear raced through iron bars to reach a boy
standing at the gate gasping for reason remembering
the ditches of the street where he lived and played
in the red mud with black boys who came in the summer.

Running from the iron-barred gate,
crying in the floor-board of a white fifty-six ford,
vowing that the wiregrass would never claim his soul.

It is that mystical time of morning; the sun is just
creating the

dawn, the dew is thick on the gray grass.

The cool, chill air warms the icy emotions inside me,

The sky is promising- of what I am unsure- it is open to all the
adventures this new day will hold.

As I sit clinging to myself - arms 'round my crunched legs-
I lay my head to the side the lose strands of hair tickling my ears.

How much longer? I've had no word of your well- being, or your
bemg at all. My heart tens me "all is weir, yet my imagination turns,
rolls into the wilderness and explodes- like a rocket sent to the outer
limits only to burst in pieces once launched,

Oh! How I've missed just the touch of you. to hear your voice, if
only a slight whisper, would illuminate the dark-side of the moon.

The trees begin to awake just as the sun kisses their sleeping
shadows.

I sit

Just as still as death

All the while my mind races through a mass of wonders. Then
suddenly they come two by two

the tears, trickling, down they run, down
to the great divide- the quivering lips

I silently kill myself with memories of past times together, with the fantasies of tomorrow and the uncertainty of the present.

I envision the pain you must too experience- this is the one feeling that haunts like no other. Sitting lonely at home I can deal with this pain, it is you that has the work to do, you see the terror face to face and yet you still stand firm.

You fight for a country that throws itself away- and WHY?

You've left the beautiful serene land to go out into a familiar unknownness I can in no way fathom it...

The horrors you must see and in some cases commit- I pray that it will not haunt you, will not change you-

It is more for you than myself that I mourn.

Now the day has arrived- the birds sweep through the air, a few woody animals scurry about, I stay planted.

Let the day come let the night go for what is it, without one to share the peace with?

My tear streaked face lifts, and I face the oncoming shine, eyes wide open, the gleam of my wet lashes looming over the bright pupils

who is here to comfort- to answer my questions- to disprove my doubts?

I arise just as you are lying to slumber- afar way out in your foreign land. May the sun and moon go forth on you, as it has me for we are still under the same sky.

Prologue: Anna and Ed had been waiting months, (in fact, nine months), for the arrival of their first child, Vanessa. In anticipation of the upcoming event, Anna spent every night reading the classics aloud to her unborn child.

Once upon a time, on a dark stormy night, Anna arose from the bed. She turned to her husband, Ed, and said, "Get up, it's time!"

"Honey," Ed replied, "aren't you afraid?"

"Of course not. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

So, over the river and through the wood, to the hospital they went. They pulled up to the door and what should appear but eight orderlies and a shiny wheelchair. Anna could hear the nurse say as she was wheeled out of sight, "Move Dasher, move Dancer, move Prancer, move Vixen. Move Comet, Move Cupid, Move Donder, and Blitzen. Take her to the end of the hall, room 103, for labor and delivery."

"The names kids have today," Anna thought to herself as she was propped up on the bed.

Call me Ishmael? They better not! First of all, I'm a girl!

The Womb is lovely, dark, and deep/but I have promises to keep/and miles to go before I sleep/and mile to go before I sleep.

"Paging Dr. Moreau. Paging Dr. Moreau." Could be heard throughout the hospital. Ed turned to Anna and asked, "That isn't your doctor is it?"

"No, don't you remember?" Anna replied, "It's Dr. Zhivago. That must be him now."

"What's up doc?" Ed greeted the doctor.

"How are thing going in here?" Dr. Zhivago inquired as he and another doctor entered the room.

"It's the best of time." Ed replied.

"Tis the worst of times!" Anna contradicted.

"Well, we will see about that. First I would like to introduce a colleague of mine, Dr. Seuss, who will be sitting in on the delivery. But for now, the time has come," the doctor continued, "to speak of many things."

"Such as what?" Anna asked.

"I'm not sure, I just thought it sounded good. But seriously, "the doctor explained, "it is time to go into delivery."

"This is no time for play. This is not time for fun. This is no time for games. There is work to be done!" Dr. Seuss reminded.

"Oh, never mind him," Dr. Zhivago whispered, "he is always rhyming!"

As Anna was quickly rolled down the hallway, one orderly could be heard singing, "Hi- ho, hi-ho, it's off to birth we go."

To be...or not to be... that is the question. Is that a question ? What is a question ?

What was the question again? Oh yes, to be...

"Ask not," the doctor replied, "what your doctor can do for you, but ask what you can do for your doctor."

"Give me liberty or give me death!" Anna groaned.

"How about if I give you something to drink?" Ed interrupted.

"Off with his head!" Anna bellowed.

Cautiously and quickly, Ed reassigned himself to another part of the room. Right at that moment, the lights went out throughout the hospital. Ed looked for the doctor and said, "Oh say, can you see by the darn emergency light?"

"Have you ever seen such a sight in life?" asked one nurse.

"Not by the hair of my chinny chin-chin!" replied another.

"Let there be light!" the doctor exclaimed, and with that the back-up lights came on.

I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date. No time to waste. I'm late, I'm late, I'm late!

"One more push!" the doctor excitedly proclaimed. "Here's the head. Oh, my! What big eyes you have!"

I am a woman. Hear me Roar!

"Listen to my girl!" Ed said proudly.
"It is finished," Anna, breathed a sigh of relief.
"Until the next one!" Ed playfully remarked.
"There can be only one!" Anna retorted.

*Free at last. Free at last,
Thank God Almighty I'm free at last!*

Epilogue: Two years later, Anna and Ed were on their way to the hospital again. This time, for the impending arrival of Vanessa's baby brother.

"Mommy," Vanessa inquired, "where are you and Daddy going?"

"We have to go to the hospital, so we can bring home your baby brother."

With that, Vanessa turned around and walked away throwing up her hands, exclaiming, "This is a day which will live in INFAMY!"

[Disclaimer: Cultural literacy, though important, has inherent dangers, as this paper demonstrates.]

We were too little to know any better.
We hollered cries of war and destruction.

Two and a half years.
Then two years. Then eleven months.
Move in, set up, move out.
My home. Your home. Their home.

Mainly South but the North held us too.
The feel of a spring day with snow on the ground.

The party with drinks and food and phone calls
Where men rushed out doors and drove away
Into a darkness that held secrets.
A strange life.

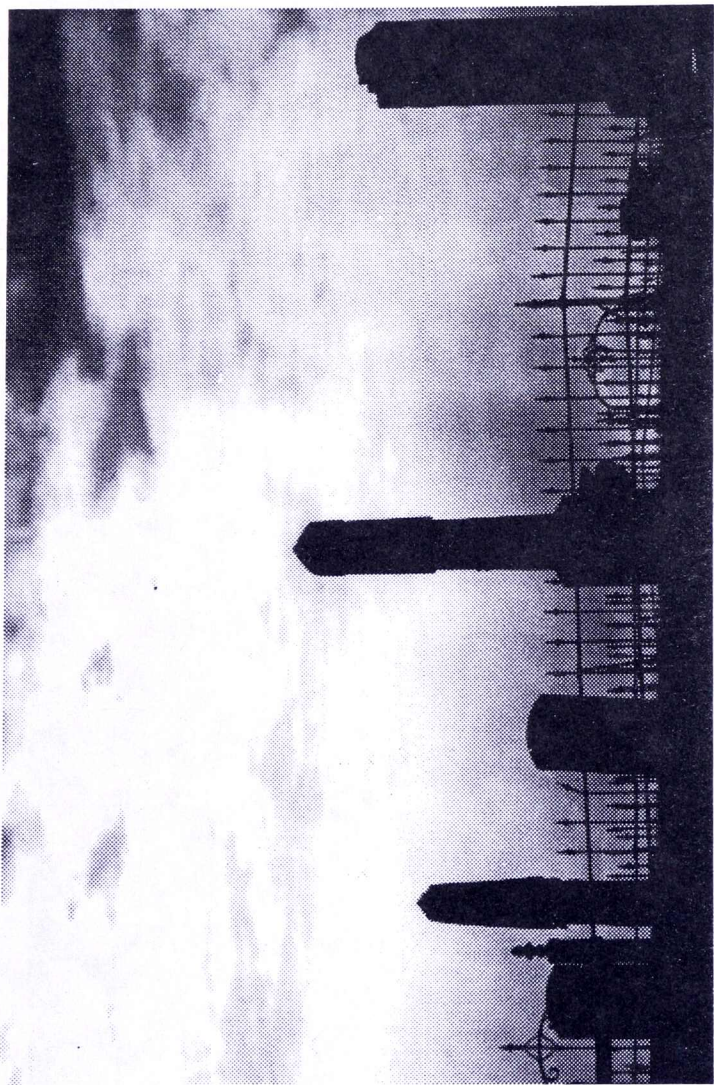
We grew up.
Friendship meant more then;
Harder to say good-bye.
We loved an ideal we didn't understand.
Trees we couldn't climb, walls we couldn't paint.

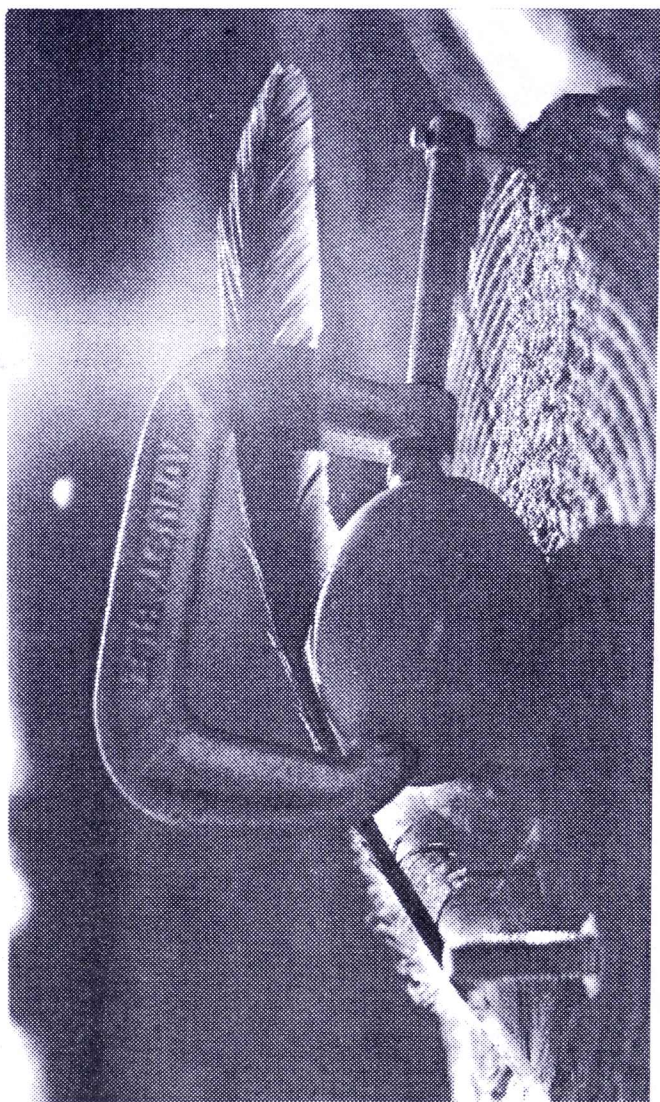
We grew up some more.
Some say we won't go too,
But we cling on.
We don't know what else to love.

Our families fall away,
Into schools and forests.
They survive.

We kiss the babies as they sleep.
The hard choices,
All worthwhile.
Soldiers.









Margaret Edson, author of the 1999 Pulitzer Prize winning play Wit, visited and spoke at Columbus State University in March of 2002 in honor of Women's History month. Edson graduated from Smith College, magna cum laude, with a degree in Renaissance history. She returned to school in 1991, on a full scholarship to Georgetown University, and earned her masters degree in English.

Edson spent six years teaching English as a second language and a subsequent year as a first grade teacher in Washington, D.C. Currently, she teaches kindergarten in Atlanta, GA.

Wit takes us into the mind of English professor Vivian Bearing. Bearing has used her knack for biting wit as an educational tool and a defense mechanism throughout her life and career. Made vulnerable by her medical struggles after she is diagnosed with cancer, she realizes that she can no longer hide behind this wit and slowly lets those around her, the audience, and, most importantly, herself realize and experience the beauty of the naked soul.

Wit was written in 1991 and premiered at South Coast Repertory in 1995, receiving many honors and awards, including the Pulitzer Prize in 1999. Wit was transferred from the stage to screen when HBO produced the play as a movie directed by Mike Nichols and starring Academy award winner Emma Thompson

Edson's talk was part of CSU's celebration of Women's History month, as well as the finale to an evening dedicated to CSU's own women of achievement. During her stay in Columbus, Edson kindly agreed to meet with me and answer a few questions for The Arden. Over pancakes, she shared with me the process of creative composition that gave literary form to a few sparks of inspiration during the creation of Wit.

Margaret Edson on the process of creative composition:

Writing is horrible. It's hard. It's lonely. It's frustrating. Anyone who wants to be a writer wants to have written. You don't want to do the work, but you want to have a book signing at a book shop. You want to have your picture on the jacket. The work of writing is horrible, hard work. And so, let me

dissuade any of your readers from dreaming of a career as a writer. Do something else.

The process for me is hours and hours of serious hard research and then five seconds of inspiration. And then days and days and days of research, and then these scenes would just pop into my mind. And then weeks of research, and then a whole exchange was clear in my mind.

So what the research was doing was supplying me with the factual knowledge that I needed, but it was also turning me into the kind of person who would be available to get the kind of ideas that were needed. So I couldn't have a group of or sparks of ideas about the doctor's relationship with Professor Bearing unless I knew a lot about doctors and the way they are trained and what a medical history is really like. So as I was reading a text book for medical students on how to do a medical history with a patient, that whole scene came into play. Then as I was studying about the cell biology of cancer and working in the basement of a college library with cell biology text books, then the exchange with Vivian and Jason about what intrigues them so much about cancer came into my mind.

I came to trust that the ideas would come. And I couldn't make them come. I just had to be ready when they came. So the function of research was a constructive something to do while I was waiting for the ideas to come. And if I were to write more about families or something that I didn't have to study so much, I'm not sure what I would be doing while I was waiting for ideas.

On a day of writing when you have one good idea, that's so clear that it's fixed in your mind, you have ten and a half hours of serious struggle. It's a ratio of hours to ten seconds. And on a day when you don't have any ten seconds, you try your little tricks. Well, I'll take a nap, go for a walk, change where I'm sitting...you have all these tricks built up to try to get those ten seconds, and they come or they don't come.

And if they come, it's so clear that I couldn't forget or I couldn't lose the idea. It was completely fixed in my mind. And when they don't come, you just have to keep working and trust that they will. But do your part.

The next part of the writing process is the part of cutting. Virginia Wolfe said that the chief virtue of composition is excision. The easy part of writing is when the ideas come, and you write as fast as your fingers can go. The hard part is going back and looking at it surgically and saying, "Will this

play? When this is up on its feet will the ideas be clear? Will the meaning that I'm looking for be evident? Will this word sound right?"

So there's a ton of work in research, a second in getting the idea, and then a ton of work in cutting.

